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Bethsaida Excavations Project

2018

2018 Bethsaida Field Report

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The plan shows the archaeological site of Tell Fara. Key features include:

- High place:** Located at the top right, indicated by a blue arrow.
- Chamber:** Located below the High place, containing a hatched area labeled "Hatched area".
- Tower:** Two towers are shown, one on the left and one on the right, both labeled "Tower".
- Courtyard:** Located between the two towers, labeled "Courtyard".
- City wall:** Located at the bottom right, labeled "City wall".

The plan includes a grid system with letters I, J, K, M and numbers 57, 59, 60, 61. A scale bar at the bottom left indicates 0 to 5m. A north arrow is also present.

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Figure 2. Stratum VI City Gate

THE EXPEDITION

A two weeks session of excavations was conducted from June 25th to July 4th, 2018. Since the expedition was arranged late in time, the group of excavators was limited to 16 participants.

The team included the architects Kenneth Bensimon from Washington State, Nic Birt from New Zealand, co-director and area supervisor Dr. Carl Savage, Drew University, Dr. Stefania Peluso Greco-Roman pottery expert, Haifa University, photographer Hanan Shafir, co-director Dr. Jerome Hall, University of San Diego, and director Prof. Rami Arav, University of Nebraska at Omaha and the Hebrew Union College Jerusalem.

This year the expedition was lodged at the guesthouse of Kibbutz Gadot. The team wish to thank the hosts for the nice, cordial and efficient hospitality.

This season was conducted under the sponsorship of the Hebrew Union College, Jerusalem. We wish to thank Dr. David Ilan, the director of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology at the Jerusalem campus of the Hebrew Union College, for his efforts to sponsoring the excavation.

Special thanks for Koret Foundation of San Francisco and Justice Abraham David Sofaer for the generous support to the success of this excavation season.

The Following Volunteers are Recognized for Participation at the Bethsaida Excavations for more than one time.

Miriam Gottlieb, Barry Davis, Karin Nobbs, Joelle Lossouarn

THE EXCAVATION

A total of 16 loci were excavated in 2018. Five loci in Area A South, the Stratum VI city gate, and 11 loci were excavated in A West, the Roman temple.

Loci listing

Area A South – Stratum VI City Gate

Locus	Grid	Stratum	Opening elevation	Closing elevation	Number of baskets	Architecture	Small finds
1264	L 59	V	171.01	171.41	2	A segment of pavement	Iron Age II B cooking pots, jars, basalt rolling stone
1265	L 58	V-VI	170.92	172.43	8	Removing pavement digging to the floor of Stratum VI	Mixed Hell. and Iron Age II pottery, Syro-Phoenician
1266	H 52	II	172.45	172.89	9	Exposing Str. V City Wall W1199	Mixed pottery, Hell. to Roman
1267	M 59	VI	172.87	172.9	1	Dislodging rocks from W1185	Iron Age II pottery, flint
1268	L 59	V	171.56	172.35	6	Removing pavement of Stratum V	Iron Age II shards of CP's, bowls and jars

Area A West – The Roman Temple

Locus	Grid	Stratum	Opening elevation	Closing elevation	Number of baskets	architecture	Small finds
2320	J 52	II	167.58	167.60	1	Removing bulk	Mixed pottery
2321	J 52	II	167.80	187.86	2	A 2 nd floor under L. 2320 under W64	Hellenistic pottery
2322	J 52	II	167.69	167.95	5	Digging to a floor level	Hellenistic pottery
2323	J 52	II	167.91	167.95	1	Floor level	Hellenistic pottery
2324	J 52	II	167.81	168.09	2	Ash layer bellows compact soil	Mixed Iron Age to Medieval pottery
2325	J 52	II	167.84	167.95	2	Debris, scattered stones	Hellenistic pottery
2326	J 52	II	167.98	168.04	5	Removing plaster floor	Hellenistic and Iron Age II pottery
2327	J 52	II	168.18	168.22	2	New floor	Hellenistic pottery
2328	J 52	II	168.02	168.24	3	Pit	Hellenistic pottery
2329	J 52	II	168.24	168.41	1	Floor	Hellenistic pottery
2330	J 52	II	168.41	168.45	1	Under L. 2329	Iron Age II pottery

Loci Report

Area A South, the Stratum VI City Gate

The search for the city gate of Stratum VI was not simple. During the long years of excavations at Bethsaida we have realized that under the massive city wall of Stratum V (9th – 8th centuries BCE) lays an earlier stratum that we marked Stratum VI. However, we initially presumed that under the monumental Four Chambers city gate of Stratum V there will be the remains of the city gate of the previous stratum, Stratum VI. Although much larger, the Bethsaida Stratum V city gate, looks very similar to the Four

Chamber city gate of the Stratum IV at Megiddo. Looking at the Megiddo sample we set probes in all the four chambers of Bethsaida in order to find the earlier gate. However, no remains of an earlier city gate were discovered. Instead we found in the excavation of Chamber 1, a solid thick wall that in later seasons we associated it with a large stone platform, used perhaps for a high place. Moreover, probes of Ground Penetrating Radar discovered that the city wall of Stratum VI, goes right under and across the city gate of Stratum V. After several season, we have concluded that Stratum VI city gate is not located under the Stratum V city gate. Bethsaida in the Iron Age did not follow the Megiddo pattern.

We almost gave up on finding the gate of Stratum VI when while digging the storage house of Stratum V, abutting to the southern wall of the city gate, we encountered under the storage house, a wall in a length of 6.23 m in a north-south direction. This wall turns east and in a length of 0.73 m it disappears under Stratum V storage house and Stratum V city wall. Interestingly enough, its southern end does not end up in a corner but simply does not continue to either side. As a rule of thumb, doors are located along walls and rarely at corners. This was the first clue that Stratum VI city gate is perhaps there. We excavated the squares south of this peculiar wall and sure enough, in a distance of 4.12 m. we discovered the counterpart of this wall that similarly does not end up in a corner. Evidently, the space in between the two ends of the walls is the passageway to the city. The floor of the passageway had a few shallow steps and hard compact floor. Obviously, the city gate of the Stratum V was not built on top of this gate but rather 25 m. north of Stratum VI city gate.

Not only the gate of Stratum V was built north of the earlier city gate, but a new and very massive city wall was built around the city in stratum V, to replace the zigzagging city wall of Stratum VI. This new city wall superimposed and blocked the earlier city gate with a 6 m. thick city wall, reinforced with massive towers in intervals of 20 m. Remarkably, on top of this wall a 2 m. city wall was built during the early first century CE, most probably by Philip the son of Herod the Great, as part of his investment in Bethsaida and upgrading it to a status of a Polis.

These two superimposed walls, Stratum V and Stratum II city walls, are too thick to remove in order to see the city gate of Stratum VI underneath. However, we could dig the area in both sides of these walls. We spent so far three years digging this area and there is still more to go.

The 2018 excavation season was aimed to collect more data on the city gate of Stratum VI. The following is a report on the loci excavated this season.

Locus 1264

The space between the Stratum V inner and outer city walls was paved with cobblestones, apparently, all around the city. Locus 1264 is a segment of the pavement that has been removed in order to reach the floor of Stratum VI city gate. The pavement were laid meticulously with small spaces between the cobblestones. One of the stones used for the pavement was a broken roller usually used to roll over dirt roofs.



Figure 3. Stratum V - red, stratum VI - green, areas unexcavated- black.



Figure 4, Stratum V, cobblestone floor of L. 1264.



Figure 5. A broken rolling stone in secondary use of pavement of Stratum V.



Figure 6. Shards from L. 1264. Iron Age II B bowl with thick everted rim, and shards of Iron Age IIB cooking pots.

Locus 1265

The lower section of this locus contains the debris of Stratum VI city gate. The upper sections are the infrastructure of the cobblestone of Stratum V. The entire locus is 1.5 m. deep. The debris and the infrastructure, contained broken and burnt bricks testifying to a high temperature fire that ended up the city gate of Stratum VI. The superstructure of Stratum VI city gate, was probably quite high to leave such

a thick layer of debris. A cobblestone pavement was discovered at the bottom of the debris. Apparently it was the courtyard of stratum VI city gate.



Figure 7. Stratum VI, the courtyard L.1265, the outer city wall and the remains of the western section of the city gate.



Figure 8. A section of Locus 1265 showing 1.15 m. of debris, burnt bricks and small stones. The top 15 cm. are the infrastructure of Stratum V. A gray horizontal layer marks the beginning of the infrastructure. On top of red burnt bricks fill is the cobblestones of Stratum V pavement situated between the inner and the outer city walls.



Figure 9. Locus 1265, the floor of Stratum VI courtyard, the outer city wall on the right side of the courtyard and a segment of the northern tower on the left side of the courtyard.



Figure 10. Diagnostics shards from L.1265. Red slip and burnished bowl.



Figure 11. Cooking pots and bowl shards from Locus 1265. These shards were probably inserted in the brick material of Stratum VI.

Locus 1266

Location: east of Stratum V city wall and on top of the southern tower of Stratum VI (W 1189). The excavations reveal a corner of Stratum V tower. The tower is in a distance of 17m south of the southeastern Stratum V city gate and 7.5m south of a buttress in Stratum V city wall (W1186). The towers surrounding Stratum V city wall were placed in a distance between 17 to 20 m one from another. This is a distance that could be effectively cover by projectiles.



Figure 12. Panoramic view of Area A South. L1266 is east of Stratum V city wall. Notice a stone that fell off the wall in the earthquake of June 2018.

Finds

In the past we have observed that material east of the city wall contains dump thrown out of the city and includes large variety of finds from the periods represented at the site. This locus is not different. Shards of pottery from the Iron Age II to Roman periods were found with Iron Age pottery at the bottom and Roman pottery at the top. A few examples are presented here.



Figure 13. Locus 1266. This basket presents shards of pottery from the Iron Age II, bottom row, Hellenistic and Roman shards including cooking pots and jars. A round stone, perhaps a sling stone thrown at the city wall was also among the finds.



Figure 14. Locus 1266, Iron Age II shards of cooking pots and a shard of a Roman period Galilean bowl.

Locus 1268

This locus is located in the middle of the courtyard leading to Stratum VI city gate. This piece was not fully removed during this season and it needs another season to remove it in order to reach the floor of the courtyard.

A cobblestone floor was discovered in level 171.47, probably an earlier floor of the passageway between the inner and outer city walls of Stratum V. In elevation of 171.76 a plaster floor was discovered. The pottery finds of this locus were all dating from the Iron Age IIB.



Figure 15. Locus 1268, a bulk on top of the courtyard.



Figure 16. Locus 1268



Figure 17. Locus 1268

Finds

Pottery shards were found in the infrastructure of Stratum V pavements. Most probably these shards were originally mixed with the clay when the bricks were made. Therefore they do not testify to the different layers of the stratum but they may serve as *terminus post quem* for the making of the bricks.



Figure 18. Shards of cooking pots and a disk base bowl from L. 1268



Figure 19. Locus 1268, shards of cooking pots and fragments of flint sickle blade.



Figure 20. Locus 1268, a shard of a carinated bowl, a stopper and cooking pot.

Area A West

The Roman temple (2m. by 5m.), at the summit of the mound and west of the Iron Age city gate, is designated as Area A West.

The temple, excavated several times in the past, was found in a bad shape of preservation. Already in late antiquity, after it went out of use in the early 2nd century CE, the temple was looted from its architectural ornaments and the spoiled elements, called in Latin *Spolia*, were reused for construction the synagogue at Chorazim. Several ornaments that were found at Bethsaida and reported by us in the past, were similar to the architectural ornaments of synagogue at Chorazim. A column base, was found buried in a pit in the floor of the temple. During the 15th – 16th centuries, a Dorian capital of the temple was taken to a secondary use. It was carved in its center and was used as a grinding stone. During the 19th century the area of the temple served a Bedouin cemetery. Carved stone ornaments were taken from the temple to be reused as tomb stones. A fragment of a stone ornament depicting grapes, was found on the surface of the mound. The final destructions to the remains of the temple were made in the mid-20th century, when the Syrians turned the site into a military position. Crisscrossing trenches and bunkers disturbed the top layers. One of these trenches was dug through the

A hand-drawn site plan of a rectangular stone structure, possibly a wall or enclosure. The structure is drawn with irregular lines representing stones. It is divided into three main sections by dashed lines. The top section is labeled 'W62'. The bottom section is labeled 'W 64'. The left section is labeled '52' and 'W66'. Inside the structure, there are several labels in blue and red boxes, some with arrows pointing to specific locations. The labels include '2326', '24116', '2328', '24114', '2329', '24118', '2327', and '24117'. A north arrow is located near the top center of the structure.

The western half of the temple was excavated to find more about its history. Past archaeological research in this area has suggested that the temple was first built in the second century BCE as a Phoenician temple. A few Phoenician figurines of a seated pregnant Astarte were found in a deposit pit next to the temple. The Phoenician temple was a rectangular structure with an entrance in the northern wall. In converting it to a Roman temple, the northern entrance was blocked and an entrance was opened to the east.

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The excavation season of 2018, revealed a series of packed crushed limestone floors that go under the southern wall of the temple (W 64), and were discovered outside of the temple. Evidently the floors preceded the construction of the temple. Thus far, the shards found on the floors date from the Hellenistic period. The purpose of these series of floors is yet unknown. One thing can be deduced from these finds is that the floors were laid in a short interval times.

Locus 2320

The highest of the series of plastered floors. The pottery collected from this locus was mixed.



Figure 22, Locus 2320, the crushed limestone floor next to wall W64

Locus 2321

A second floor under L. 2320. As is seen in the photograph below, the floor is located 20 cm below W 64, the southern wall of the temple and obviously predates the temple.



Figure 23, Locus 2321 is 20 cm below W64.

Locus 2322

This locus is a probe in the center of the temple. The probe revealed a pit excavated in the northern end of the locus. The finds included a few Hellenistic pottery and a few bones. Among the Hellenistic shards there was an Eastern Terra Sigillata (ETS) shard and an Early Roman Galilean bowl, testifying that the pit was excavated in the Roman period perhaps the second century CE.



Figure 24. L. 2322 shows scattered stones in a pit.



Figure 25. Locus 2322, a pit containing loose dirt is seen in the northern end of the locus.

Locus 2323

This is another floor in the series of plastered floors that covered the area. It is about 25cm below W64, the southern wall of the temple.

Very few Hellenistic shards of pottery were retrieved from this floor.



Figure 26. Locus 2323. Compact floor is about 25 cm below W64

Locus 2324

This locus contains ash layer below the floor of L. 2322. A few pottery shards were found, one seems to be a medieval and the other Iron Age.



Figure 27, Finds from Locus 2324, a painted medieval and an Iron Age shards.

Locus 2325

Locus 2322 was subdivided when scattered stones in loose soil appeared, apparently a pit. This locus is located about 1.5 m. north of W64. The small finds included Hellenistic shards of pottery.



Figure 28. Scattered field stones in a pit.

Locus 2326

Two superimposing plastered floors were discovered in this locus. The same as L. 2324. Below the second floor there was a layer of small stones, perhaps the infrastructure of the floor, below that there was a darker earth with some ashes.

The finds include Hellenistic and Iron Age pottery and a ceramic bead.



Figure 29. Locus 2326, a pit 2328 is in the upper right side of the picture (the southern end of the locus).



Figure 30. A bottom of an Iron Age tripod cup, and a Hellenistic shard of a handle of a cooking pot.



Figure 31. Iron Age shards from Locus 2326,



Figure 32. A clay bead in Locus 2326



Figure 33, Iron Age shard of pottery.

Locus 2327

This locus consists of removing ash layer situated below the floor. New floor appeared below.



Figure 34. Locus 2327, a floor under series of floors.

Finds include Hellenistic pottery shards and a burnt bone.



Figure 35, a burnt rib bone from Locus 2327.

Locus 2329

A Hellenistic pit in the center of the temple.



Figure 36, Locus 2328 in the upper right of the picture, (the southern end of the temple). The dark lines in the picture are the lines of the shading tarp.



Figure 37, Hellenistic pottery from Locus 2328.



Figure 38, Pottery from Locus 2328 it includes ETS and a double handle of a Hellenistic jar.

Locus 2329

This locus consists of removing embedded collapse stones. A 5 cm thick floor is discovered. Finds include Hellenistic pottery shards.



Figure 39. Locus 2329 under a sequence of floors.

Locus 2330

The floor of 2329 was removed and the locus expanded to the north. A few Hellenistic shards of pottery were discovered.